



Government of South Georgia and the South Sandwich Islands

Expedition Policy and Application Procedures

Part 1 General Expedition Information

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Part 1 General Expedition Information

1.1 Introduction

With the exception of GSGSSI, BAS and staff based at KEP, approved HMG staff, permitted BAS staff, officially-sponsored visitors, members of HM forces or MOD personnel on operational duty, all visitors intending to spend nights ashore on South Georgia or the South Sandwich Islands are classed as expeditions.

All expeditions require a permit from the Commissioner for South Georgia and the South Sandwich Islands.

If the information provided in an expedition application is inaccurate or misleading, or if it later transpires that professional guides have not made every effort to take responsible care of their clients, the Commissioner reserves the right to revoke an expedition permit and or restrict the future access of individual applicants and professional guides or commercial operations.

Expedition applications must be submitted to the Office of the Commissioner no later than 60 days before an expedition arrives in South Georgia (or the South Sandwich Islands) and will be assessed by a panel of experts who will advise the Commissioner on the application. In deciding whether to issue a permit, and whether any conditions should be placed on such a permit, the Commissioner will take the panels advice into account.

From 1 July 2010 an administrative fee of £1,000 will be charged for the assessment and permitting procedure.

In addition to the information contained in this document, all applicants must be fully apprised of the most recent version of the "Information for Visitors to South Georgia" booklet, which includes the South Georgia Tourism Management Policy document. (This is available on the website www.sgisland.gs).

All expeditions must be supported throughout by an adequately insured expedition support vessel. Participants must also have adequate personal insurance (see section 1.3.4). GSGSSI is unable to provide support (including Search and Rescue) cover for expeditions. Emergency assistance provided by vessels, which happen to be in the vicinity of an expedition, may result in costs being charged to participants. Similarly Expedition participants should be aware that they may be charged for any costs to Government of environmental clean up or remediation operations necessitated by their actions.

1.2 Application Assessment Process

All expedition applications are subject to an assessment process by a panel of consultants who have extensive experience of planning and leading expeditions to South Georgia. The panel will be guided by the planning factors and application requirements covered in this document.

The application should be submitted no later than 60 days prior to the Expeditions' departure from home. This allows for liaison between the panel and the Government, and if needs be, to consult further with the expedition applicants where clarification of changes are necessary.

The Chairman of the Expedition Assessment Panel is Caradoc 'Crag' Jones. All expedition application correspondence should be directed to the Chairman and copied to GSGSSI Operations Director Steve Brown: cragjones@csj.myzen.co.uk | steve.brown@gov.gs

On receipt of an Expedition Application GSGSSI will invoice the applicant for the £1,000 pounds (GBP) Assessment and Permitting Fee. The invoice will include the GSGSSI bank details and payment information.

The fee charged purely covers the administrative costs of the assessment and permitting process. The assessment process exists to report to Government, thereby enabling Government to make an informed decision on whether or not to issue a permit. This assessment process does NOT provide any form of paid service to the applicant.



On completion of the assessment process, the Chairman will write to the Commissioner for SGSSI outlining the panel's recommendations. A decision will then be taken by GSGSSI as to whether an Expedition Permit can be issued, or refused, or whether alterations or improvements are required before the application can be reconsidered.

If one of your expedition's objectives is to bring benefits to the island, please include your proposals in your application. All scientific data gathered on the island should be made available to the South Georgia Geographical Information System (SGGIS) and scientists should liaise in advance with Paul Cooper at BAS (APRC@bas.ac.uk), who manages the SGGIS, so as to ensure that all data gathered is compatible with the system.

A post expedition report is to be submitted to the Chairman of the advisory panel and the Commissioner within one month of your departure from South Georgia. (Covered in Part 3).

1.3 Planning Factors

These notes are intended to provide initial background on the island and highlight particular issues, which your expedition will need to consider during the planning stage. They are not a substitute for more detailed research and are not exhaustive.

Part 2 offers guidance on making an application. The onus is on the applicant to provide all relevant information to assist the assessment process.

1.3.1 Topography:

South Georgia is a remote and mountainous sub-Antarctic Island, some 170 km long and 40 km wide. It is dominated by two mountain ranges with the island's highest peak, Mount Paget, reaching to 2,934m (9,625 ft). The island's interior is covered with permanent snow and ice cover, large glaciers stretch from the mountain ranges and ice caps into the sea ending in an area of crevasses followed by fragile and unstable ice cliffs that frequently shed tons of ice. In winter, over one metre of snow can accumulate at sea level with and much more at higher altitudes, and there can be frosts and snowfalls during the austral summer. The coast is forbidding with steep cliffs and glaciers running into the sea.

1.3.2 Weather:

The Island is exposed to a persistent stream of deep depressions moving east from Drake Passage across the Scotia Sea. The south side of the island bears the brunt of the prevailing weather. The north side of the island does provide some sheltered bays and clearer weather. However, katabatic winds are frequent and can reach gale force; moderate synoptic winds can be accelerated up to over 100 mph on the Island's north side. The average summer temperature is plus 4.8 degrees centigrade and in winter the average is minus 1.2 degrees centigrade at sea level. Extreme wind chill factors, increasing with altitude, are frequent throughout the year. The mean lowest annual temperature is minus 11 degrees centigrade and the lowest recorded temperature at Grytviken is minus 14 degrees centigrade.

1.3.3 Local Population and Visitors:

Very few people live on South Georgia.

The Government Officers (2), who are responsible for all the Government administrative duties on the island, are based at King Edward Point (KEP). The Government Officers are supported in this task by the BAS staff from the applied fisheries science research station at KEP. During the summer months a few museum staff also live at Grytviken.

The two BAS research stations at KEP and Bird Island are manned throughout the year. Visiting vessels include the GSGSSI Fishery Protection Vessel, MOD vessels, fishing vessels, research vessels, cruise ships and yachts. The cruise ship season runs from late October to late March.

1.3.4 Self Sufficiency, Insurance and Resources Ashore:

Given the harsh environment, limited resources ashore and remote location, all expeditions must be totally self sufficient and this must be factored into the planning from the outset.

Participants must have adequate personal insurance that covers medical evacuation and repatriation. Support vessels must have appropriate insurance or cover as specified in the vessel's Visit Application information. Policy details must be provided with the application. Support vessel Masters should also ensure that each expedition member has adequate personal insurance.

In particular, the lack of search and rescue (SAR) and medical facilities means that expeditions must be totally self sufficient and self reliant, with a support vessel in attendance, or in reasonably close proximity and able to respond at all times. Expedition planners need to acknowledge this fact and accept that there is an inherent risk associated with expeditions in such a remote and potentially hostile environment.

There can be no reliance placed on any form of SAR assistance coming from either GSGSSI or BFAI (British Forces South Atlantic Islands).

The two British Antarctic Survey Research Stations (Bird Island and King Edward Point) and the museum at Grytviken are self-contained and have no spare capacity or training to support expeditions.

The nearest Search and Rescue facilities and hospital are located in the Falkland Islands some 850 miles to the west. (Staff on the base at KEP cannot provide SAR support and could only provide very limited assistance in the immediate vicinity of Grytviken.) There is no guarantee that the authorities in the Falkland Islands would be capable of initiating a SAR operation to South Georgia on any given day. A rescue mounted from the Falkland Islands would be wholly dependent on a suitable vessel(s) or aircraft being operational, on station, and in a position to respond. Mobilisation and passage to South Georgia could take many days and would involve immense effort and expense.



In effect, there must be no reliance placed on any form of unsubstantiated external assistance during the course of planning expeditions to South Georgia.

Expedition Leaders should take into account their own team's ability (or lack of ability) to respond to emergency requests for assistance from without their own expedition.

1.3.5 Environmental Protection:

Many areas of South Georgia are still pristine or particularly vulnerable to environmental damage. The island is an extremely important natural breeding site for numerous marine species, including 4 species of penguin, 4 species of albatross, 11 species of petrel, the only Antarctic Songbird and many other birds, some of which are threatened and others are in decline. Elephant seals and fur seals breed on the beaches and two large herds of reindeer range over the hinterland.

Applicants must refer to the current Information for Visitors to South Georgia Booklet and include a full environmental plan (including thorough biosecurity measures) with their application. (Covered in Part 2).

If the panel considers that a particularly sensitive site is at risk of human impact, they may recommend the use of WAG Bags for the disposal of human waste.

1.3.6 Participants and Group size:

Exploration should only be conducted under leaders of high calibre and with a range of suitable experience and where necessary appropriate qualifications. Members of an expedition should have strong motivation, be both physically and medically fit and be prepared to effect self rescue in an emergency. A list of participants, their experience, CV's, contact details and next of kin details should be included in your application.

Guidelines for group sizes are a minimum size of 4 persons (or 3 persons if there are an additional 2 competent persons available to go ashore and assist the group) and a maximum group size of 15, depending on planned activities and locations.

In the case of commercial or professionally guided expeditions the panel may recommend a minimum client – guide ratio of 1:4 and a minimum of 2 guides in any group regardless of size.

1.3.7 Safety:

A safety plan (covered in Part 2) that includes full emergency and medical contingencies must be submitted as an integral part of the expedition application.

1.3.8 Maps:

GSGSSI recommends use of the 2004 BAS map of South Georgia (Sheets BAS (Misc) 12A and 12B.) Note, however, that the contour lines are arbitrary and may not be truly representative. This may be obtained from Stanfords in the UK (www.stanfords.co.uk)

Alternatively this map may be accessed / downloaded from: www.add.scar.org website. Applicants can then work with a digital format and arrange to print enlarged sections of specific areas as appropriate.

Compasses should also be correctly balanced for this region of the Southern Hemisphere. Further information may be found at: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Compass#Compass_balancing

1.3.9 Former Whaling Stations:

Permission will not normally be given to visit or enter within 200m of the former whaling stations at Husvik, Stromness, Leith and Prince Olav, neither must their jetties be used. All of the stations are in an extremely hazardous state and there is a risk of exposure to airborne asbestos. Any matters relating to these former whaling stations must be addressed separately through direct correspondence with GSGSSI.

Glossary

GSGSSI Government of South Georgia and the South Sandwich Islands

BAS British Antarctic Survey

KEP King Edward Point

HMG Her Majesty's Government

MOD Ministry of Defence



Part 2 Application Requirements

The Expedition application should be formatted as follows:

Title of Expedition To South Georgia: Expedition Leader:

2.1 Introduction (maximum 10 lines of text)

- a) Provide a brief outline of the proposed expedition and its objectives. Include key dates and the size of party.
- b) Mention any other details of importance.
- c) Confirm you have received and read the current version of the "Information for Visitors to South Georgia" booklet (available on the website www.sgisland.gs)
- d) Applicants must state if the proposed expedition is private, commercial, charitable, filming or other, or any combination of these.

2.2 Background

- a) Include any relevant detail of previous experience in the Polar Regions.
- b) Mention any other information relevant to your application.

2.3 Support Vessel

- a) Provide details of your support vessel, including type of vessel and description. Include any IAATO membership details.
- b) Crew details and experience.
- c) Provide vessel contact details.
- d) Provide details of communication, medical and life-saving equipment carried as well as any launches or Zodiacs carried. (Masters of support vessels must include vessel insurance details when completing their visit application).

2.4 Insurance details

- a) Provide details of the participants insurance policies, including cover for medivac and repatriation.
- b) Copies of policies should be attached.

2.5 Scope & Composition

- a) Describe the expedition in detail, its aims and objectives, dates, programme and the places to visit including overnight campsites, intended overland routes, support vessel details, pick up and drop sites, dates and duration.
- b) Attach a list of those involved with CV's detailing their previous experience, relevant qualifications, contact details and Next of Kin details. This should also detail their role or combination of roles in the expedition and clearly state whether each participant is a crew member, guide, client, researcher, film maker etc. Please state whether each participant is there in a professional (ie receiving payment) or amateur capacity.
- c) Describe how the expedition is to be supported and sustained.
- d) The application should state clearly the areas of authority of each member of the party, any Chain of Command within the party and identify those members with ultimate responsibility for decision-making on safety issues.

2.6 Safety Plan (to include emergency and medical contingencies)

- a) Emphasise any experience within the group that would enhance safety e.g. dealing with cold weather injuries, avalanche rescue, snow-hole survival, and rescue at sea.
- b) Explain the size of groups, their movement, any critical decision points and emergency exit routes as appropriate.
- c) Provide details of the expedition's medical arrangements and the relevant experience of those responsible, particularly dealing with the prevention and treatment of cold weather injuries.
- d) Include any details of pre-medical assessments of participants.
- e) List communication devices to be taken (and contact details).
- f) Explain and assess the factors that might cause you to change your itinerary (e.g. weather, medical, accident, equipment failure or fire)
- g) Detail your contingency plans in the event of a medical problem or accident ashore.
- h) Attach a list of personal equipment including safety equipment (e.g. evacuation sledges, snow shovels, emergency bivouac equipment and first aid kits) to be taken.



2.7 Environmental Plan

- a) Explain how the environmental and wildlife protection measures detailed in the current publication "Information for Visitors to South Georgia" booklet are being met. This should also include measures to protect buildings and artefacts of historical interest.
- b) Provide a detailed biosecurity plan (refer to the biosecurity protocols detailed in the Information for Visitors to South Georgia Booklet). Confirm your support ship will provide a De-ratting / ship sanitation certificate if over 100 tonnes. If moving from infested areas to Rat free areas, explain the precautions you will take to avoid any risk of possible transfer of rodents. Explain your other invasive species migration avoidance measures (e.g. procedures for bootwashing between sites and use of disinfectants / biocides before going ashore, checks that no alien soil or seeds or invertebrates will be inadvertently taken ashore or translocated between sites in personal kit or stores).
- c) Confirm no poultry products will be taken ashore.
- d) Explain how refuse including garbage, excess food, grey water and human waste will be disposed.
- e) Explain how the risk of fire will be minimised.
- f) Identify any potential environmental impacts that may arise from your activities and explain how these will be minimised. This must cover all activities affecting all flora and fauna in both terrestrial and marine communities. (For example explain your arrangements for campsites – e.g. 200m away from wildlife concentrations, not on lichen or moss beds and the removal and disposal of waste).

2.8 Post Expedition Report (see Part 3)

Confirm a post expedition report will be sent GSGSSI and the Chairman of the Expedition Assessment Panel.

Attachments:

List of Participants (to include CV's, contact details and Next of Kin details). List of Safety Equipment

Copies of insurance certificates for participants

Part 3 Expedition Report

The Expedition Report should be submitted to the Chairman of the assessment panel and copied to GSGSSI within one month of completing an expedition and departing from South Georgia.

This report may be made available for public access on the South Georgia Government's website. If you wish to include information that should not be made public please detail this in a separate annex, with reasons for confidentiality. The Government will not make such an annex public without further discussion with you and will only do so if it deems publication to be in the public interest.

The Expedition Report should include the following.

3.1 Introduction

Include a brief summary of the expedition highlighting any major occurrences.

3.2 Expedition Objectives

Summarise the expedition's objectives.

3.3 Reports on Activities

- a) Report on the activities of the expedition including the following:
- b) Relevant dates, location of campsites (including huts used), routes walked, vessels pick up and drop off sites, any unexpected incidents.
- c) A map showing land routes and campsites, vessel pick up and drop off points.
- d) A list of any peaks attempted. Details should clearly indicate the mountains concerned (Any name, altitude, latitude and longitude from map. The particulars of the map referred to should also be included.) A definitive statement should be made saying whether the summit was successfully reached or whether the attempt was unsuccessful. The date of successful summit bids should be recorded along with the names of the successful summiteers.
- e) Standard Post-Visit Report for the expedition vessel, to be completed by the Master of the vessel.
- f) Any other sketches and photographs, diagrams and maps as appropriate.



3.4 Safety Plan

Comment on the safety plan. Did it work? Could it have been improved?

3.5 Environmental Plan

- a) Include an assessment of how well the expedition's measures worked in minimising environmental impacts, including a record of observed direct impacts and implementation of biosecurity measures.
- b) Any unusual wildlife and or environmental events observed e.g. large numbers of dead seals or birds or accumulations of beach debris or other rubbish.

3.6 Expedition Application and Processing

Comment on the way your expedition application was processed and suggest any ways in which the process could be improved.

3.7 Summary

Summarise the achievements of your expedition.